

# Accountis Article: How to Build Better Customer Relationships with E-Invoicing

Accountis Europe Ltd.  
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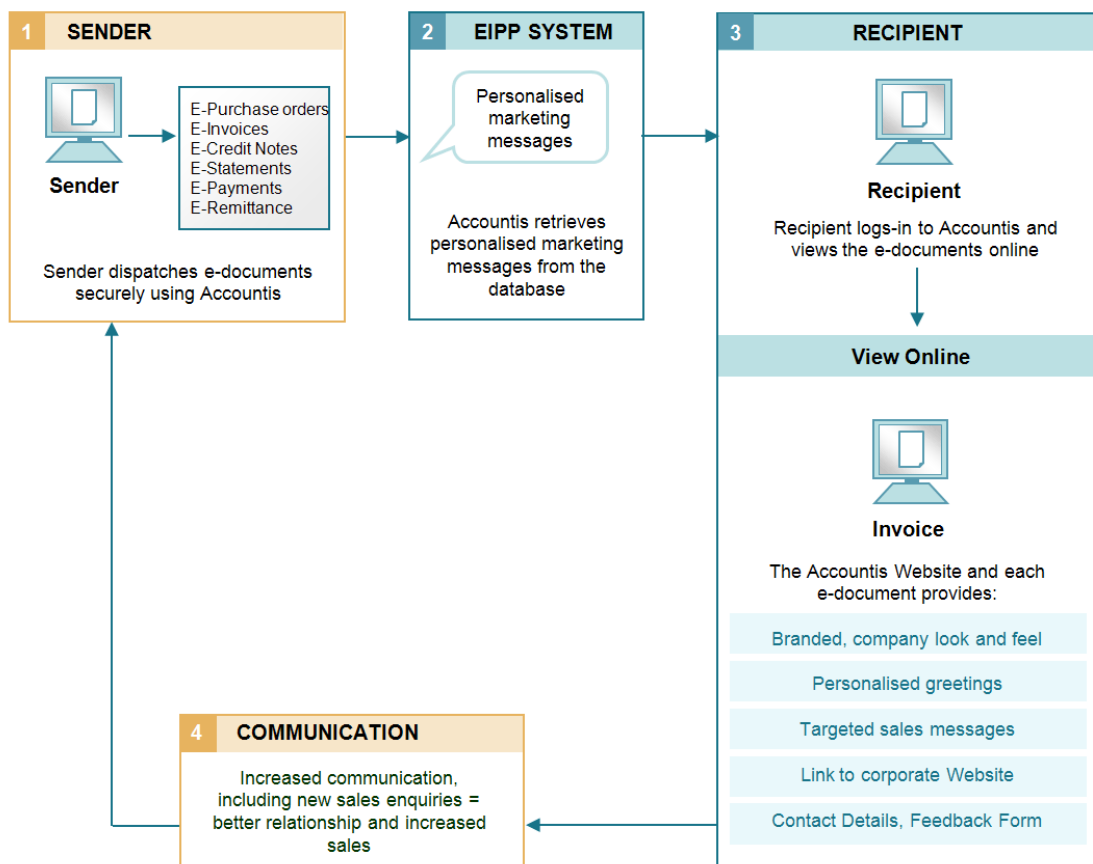
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## Introduction

Purchase orders, invoices, credit notes, statements; these are perhaps the most important documents your company sends out. Without them you would not get paid and without money your business would not exist. But all these documents could be so much more than a means of collecting and processing cash. In some instances documents that are sent out as part of the purchase-to-pay process are the only consistent communication a company has with a supplier or customers. Adapting such documents so that they contain personalised, targeted and relevant marketing messages should be seen as a golden opportunity not to be missed. Electronic documents are highly suited to this purpose, as they can be dispatched quickly and cheaply, and can be generated by intelligent billing systems which contain historical information about a customer's buying history. Used effectively, electronic documents can help you to increase sales through cross-selling, help strengthen your brand awareness and improve your overall customer relationship.

## Background to EIPP

Electronic Invoice Presentation and Payment (EIPP) systems enable users to eliminate paper by taking their invoicing process online. Users can exchange and manage finance documents such as e-invoices and e-statements, and make secure payments online. In the case of Accounts Receivable the online process is simple; a sender dispatches e-documents from their existing accounting package which are then generated by the EIPP provider and made available for viewing securely online. Recipients are prompted by email to login to a secure Website (AR Portal) where they can then view, approve and process the document, and make an electronic payment. It is a quick, efficient and cost effective method of completing the invoicing process that encourages expedient communication between document sender and recipient. The diagram below illustrates the EIPP receivables process, highlighting communication flow between sender and recipient:



Since all e-documents must be viewed online via the password protected Portal, the Portal itself becomes an excellent interactive platform for companies to communicate personalised messages with your customers. Even using a simple personalised greeting can help to make users feel more individual and therefore distinguish your approach from competitors. Furthermore, by providing information such as sales and support telephone numbers or a quick link to an online feedback form, you will stimulate two-way communication to hopefully initiate new sales.

## Relationship Marketing and EIPP

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The benefits of adopting an EIPP system over more traditional paper-based methods are well documented on the Accountis Website ([www.accountis.com/resources](http://www.accountis.com/resources)) and throughout our articles. Substantial cost and time savings, elimination of duplications and reduced errors are just a few of the many advantages. However, it also provides you with an ideal platform for building better relationships with your customers by listening to their needs, making them feel individual and improving overall communication throughout the invoicing process. An e-document provides your company with the perfect vehicle for effective relationship marketing for the following reasons:

- **One-to-one communication throughout the invoicing process**  
EIPP services allow you to complete the entire invoicing process online. This means that every step in the process (invoice, statement, receipt, payment) becomes an opportunity for you to communicate with, and sell to your customers. One advantage of this is the fact is that once a product has been sold or job completed, you can maintain effective communication with your customers in-between sales. Maintaining a high profile with your customers may help to initiate the next sale and improve overall customer loyalty.
- **Clear and efficient documents help to eliminate pain**  
EIPP provides you and your customers with a quick and efficient process that eliminates the pain of a more traditional paper process. EIPP can deliver clear and concise invoices and statements that can be quickly viewed and dealt with online. By providing your customers with a complete service that makes life easier for them you will encourage repeat sales and build a long-term business relationship.
- **Cost effective for you**  
Sending documents electronically is far cheaper and quicker than sending them on paper. E-documents, and therefore your marketing messages, can be delivered in an instant and updated regularly at a very low cost.
- **Increased personalisation**  
With EIPP your customers billing history can be utilised quickly and simply to deliver personalised, effective marketing messages. One-to-one marketing messages can be created automatically and tailored to meet individual customer needs and requirements to maximise sales potential.
- **Improved communication makes customers feel valued**  
If an invoice is the only means of regular communication you have with your customer, then you'd better make the most of it. Providing your customers with additional information about products and services that may be of interest to them will make them feel more valued. Treat your customers like individuals and they are more likely to continue doing business with you. Your personalised e-invoicing Portal provides an ideal platform for you to do this.
- **An efficient process gives you more time to provide a better service**  
Speedier invoice delivery, reduced errors, faster dispute resolution – these are all benefits of an e-invoicing service that will give you more time to spend working on your customer relationship. In turn your customers will benefit from receiving a more efficient and better quality service.

## Making Relationship Marketing Work

Although we sometimes forget it, it is much more cost-effective to sell products and services to existing customers than it is to spend money on acquiring new ones. We know in theory why the EIPP process is important to building better business relationships, but now let's look at how it can be best implemented.

One of the many aims of relationship marketing is to reduce your overall marketing expenses by selling more effectively to customers you already have. Improving communication, strengthening your brand and encouraging loyalty are just three factors that will help you retain customers for longer and potentially increase sales. In order to make relationship marketing work you need to incorporate the following four elements into any strategy:

### 1. One-to-one communication

All messages need to be friendly and individual to your company as this will make you stand out from your competitors. Try to make every communication with your customers personal in some way, no matter how small as this will help you to retain their custom – you'd be surprised how many of your competitors do not see the value of this approach.

### 2. Make the connection

Ensure that your sales messages connect with your customer on an emotional level. For example, we all know how annoying it is to receive a flyer, phone call or email about a product that is not relevant to our business. To make a successful connection you need to research your customers well by looking at their buying patterns. That way you will send the right message to the right customer.

### 3. Encourage involvement

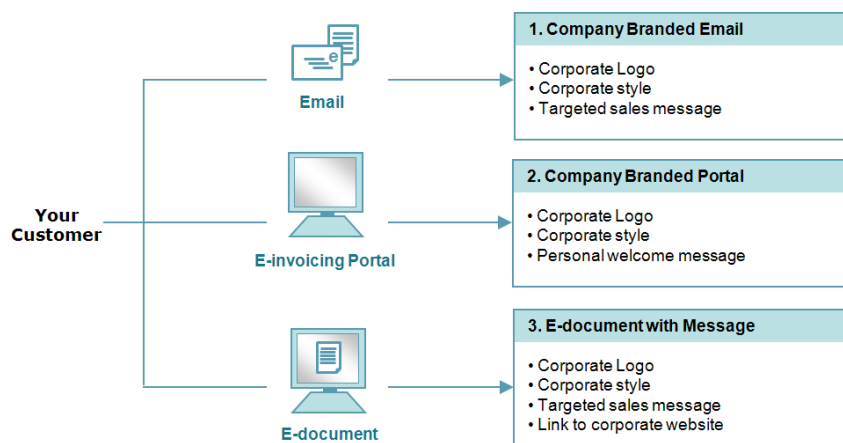
Don't underestimate the importance of making your customers feel appreciated and understood. By making a conscious effort to listen to feedback (good and bad!) you will be surprised at how easy it is to increase satisfaction levels and make your present customers feel more valued.

### 4. Reward loyalty

Encouraging loyalty is the key to building profitable business relationships -the last thing you want is to lose an important customer to a competitor. If you nurture good relationships by offering special deals and promotions you are more likely to retain the clients you have, and keep them for longer.

## Delivering Your Message

EIPP provides you with three main ways to maintain targeted communication with both your customers and suppliers throughout the invoicing process. The diagram below illustrates these three ways:



Although the technology behind the EIPP process is normally provided by a third party vendor, there is ample opportunity for companies to 'stamp their identity' on the process to make it a unique, personal experience for customers. Let us take an individual look at the 3 main methods as described in the diagram:

#### 1. **Company Branded Emails**

Throughout the invoicing emails are regularly sent out to update users on the progress of their e-documents. For example, this could be to notify recipients that a new e-document is ready for viewing, that a dispute has been settled, or that an e-invoice has been paid. These emails are produced in HTML format and can be branded with your corporate style so that the recipient immediately recognises who it is from and can respond accordingly. These notification emails can also include individual sales messages enabling you make the most of every communication you have with your clients.

#### 2. **Company Branded E-Invoicing Portal**

All e-documents are processed by accessing a secure, password protected Website. This Website can be branded with your corporate logo and style and as all users need a unique username and password to access the site, the homepage is personalised with a unique welcome message for every user. The homepage can also be used to display specific marketing banners and messages.

#### 3. **E-Document With Sales Message**

An essential part of the EIPP process is the viewing of all e-documents online in HTML format. So, as well as being displayed within your corporate-style, each e-document can display an individual sales message, which could take the form as a simple promotional message or a hyperlink to a specific page on your Website.

## Using Relationship Marketing to Increase Sales

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So far we have looked at the four main elements of successful relationship marketing and the platforms you can use implement them within the EIPP process. We have seen that EIPP can offer a powerful combination of branded emails, personalised E-Invoicing Portal and targeted e-documents to help you achieve your goals. Therefore, to summarise, here are a few practical tactics you could use to being launching your strategy:

- **Link to specific products**  
Use your notification emails and e-documents to cross-sell products or services by including targeted sales messages. Include hyperlinks to products and demos on your corporate Website to drive traffic to specific pages.
- **Link to new promotions**  
Use your banner-advertising space on your Accountis Desktop to promote your latest product or service. Include a hyperlink that targets related pages on your corporate Website to increase traffic. This will also ensure sure that content changes regularly on your Accountis Desktop to maintain interest.
- **Offer incentives for early payers**  
Incorporate an incentive scheme into your accounting system so that early payers are rewarded. Send them a personalized thank you email after an early payment has been made, and maybe offer them a voucher to spend on your corporate Website. Include a hyperlink to a specific product that you think they may be interested in.
- **Link to feedback form**  
Let your customers know that you want to hear from them. Provide them with an easy means of communication that will encourage them to get in touch with you in-between sales. This can be achieved by simply adding a hyperlink on your Accountis Desktop to a sales enquiry form on your corporate Website.

- **Conduct an online customer survey**  
If you really want to make your customers feel valued, link to an online survey from the Accountis Desktop. Let them know that you want to learn more about what they think of your products and services, so that you can provide a better quality service.
- **Use client testimonials and case studies**  
Let your customers know just how good you really are by featuring successful case studies and including complimentary testimonials. Use your branded emails and e-documents to display powerful quotations from other important customers or use your Accountis Desktop banner space to link to your latest success story.
- **Produce an e-newsletter**  
Build up your reputation as being an expert in your field by producing an informative e-newsletter. Writing a good e-newsletter containing articles and white papers about subjects your customers will find useful is hard work, but can be very rewarding for everyone involved. Use your Accountis Desktop banner space to promote your newsletter and link directly to a subscription page on your corporate Website.

## Further Information

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Accountis EIPP is a trusted, flexible and scalable online service that makes processing invoices and payments simpler. We develop sophisticated and compliant e-invoicing solutions for large corporates, banks and financial institutions Worldwide and specialise in automating and simplifying complex finance processes to improve efficiency, increase control and reduce costs.

With **Accountis Enterprise AR** you can Present and manage all your invoices and other receivables documents online for a faster, greener and more cost-effective process. Accountis Enterprise AR automates your entire accounts receivable process from capturing e-purchase orders and issuing e-invoices to controlling debtors and collecting payments online. Accountis Enterprise AR is fully VAT compliant and integrates easily with your existing ERP or billing systems to deliver a paperless and efficient invoicing process. In addition to eliminating all the labour, material and posting costs associated with paper invoicing, the benefits for suppliers include error reduction, quicker settlement, and improved visibility. Customers can enjoy faster invoice delivery, invoice data download into any finance system and faster dispute resolution. They can also benefit from early payment terms and an overall improvement in customer service. Accountis Enterprise AR works seamlessly alongside your existing systems and can be used standalone or in conjunction with Accountis Enterprise AP and additional modules for an end-to-end solution.

**For more information on sending e-invoices online, please visit the Accountis website at [www.accountis.com](http://www.accountis.com)**